THE MEANING *of* LIFE

A Primer of Theosophy

By Emogene S. Simons

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FOREWORD

This is a primer or "first book" about the *meaning* of life. All of us know facts about life. We know about birth and growth and death. We know the necessity of work. We know the joys and sorrows of family ties. We know wider activities in school and church and community. But not many of us stop long enough to consider what all these things really mean. Are they matters of chance or are they parts of a plan? We all have to undergo the many experiences of life. Why not, by understanding, try to make those experiences pleasant?

When we go on a journey, it is wise to get helpful information in advance. It is well to know where we are going, to know the route, and something of what to expect along the way. Is it not worth while, also, to learn something about the destination, the purpose and the plan of the journey called life?

There is a body of such vital knowledge gathered and preserved throughout the ages. This knowledge underlies both religion and science. As we are yet far from perfect, so the truths already recognized are but part of that whole to be known in the future. This body of truths is called Divine Wisdom. It is also called Theosophy—a term coined from two Greek words meaning God-Wisdom, or Knowledge of God.

In this wisdom called Theosophy we have a teaching as old as life itself and as new as today.

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I THE SOURCE OF LIFE

There are three ways of looking at the meaning of life. Is it a hit-or-miss affair, all chance? Is it partly a matter of chance and partly a matter of order? Or is it all a part of one great plan only partially understood by us as yet?

We know, of course, that the first way—all chance—can not be true. We can see evidence of law and order in many things around us. There is the orderly following of day after night. There is the regular change of seasons. In animal and human life there is the orderly round of birth, growth and death. If order can be found in some cases, life is not all a matter of chance.

It is also impossible to consider life as partly a matter of chance and partly a matter of order. Where can a dividing line be drawn? And who or what is responsible for that line of division?

It is surely far more sensible to think of *all* life as a result of order and reason. When it seems to be without order or reason, may it not be that our own knowledge is incomplete? Sufficient information usually shows that everything has a place, as a separate piece fits into a picture puzzle.

Now a universe of natural law and order presupposes a Great Mind or Intelligence back of it. Suppose that some morning you found in front of your door a collection of pebbles arranged in the form of a star. Would

you not conclude at once that some mind had been at work there? Likewise there are signs of such orderly arrangement in the universe. All life shows evidence of definite plan in its forms and cycles. Even the minerals in the earth behave in certain ways and in those ways only. The stars obey fixed principles or laws. If there is order in so many places, there must be some center or source of order. What is this source?

This Great Intelligence or Divine Mind is called God in our part of the world. In our language the words *God* and *good* have the same root. Other names are used in other lands. *Brahman* is the name used in India. *Allah* is the name used in countries where the followers of Mohammed live. But all these names mean the same thing: the one source of life. No scientist, no matter how wise, can of himself create life from no life. Only God can create life. God is Himself the life of His universe. He is everywhere and in everything. He is in the least as well as in the greatest.

One way of understanding the everywhereness of God is to think of Him as living in and through His universe, just as we live in and through the cells of our physical bodies. Yet He is more than His universe, just as we are greater than our bodies. He is both masculine and feminine: a wise father and a loving mother. He is also eternal, without end in time—so far as at present we can understand time.

We can not see or hear God. We can not touch Him or contact Him through our other physical senses. Neither can we see or hear or touch love or knowledge —but we can be aware of them through their results. In like manner we can learn to understand God through His universe and through our own inner selves.

SUMMARY

Life is not a mere matter of chance. It is part of an orderly progress or growth. There is in the universe a great Mind or Power called God. He is the source of all life. He dwells within us and without us. He is undying and eternally wise and good. He is known by many names, but He is the same everywhere. He can not be seen or heard or touched. But He can be perceived by all who desire to perceive Him.

II WHO AND WHAT WE ARE

Since God is in all that exists, we ourselves are a part of Him. "In Him we live and move and have our being." The Bible says also that we are made in the image of God. That does not mean, of course, that we look like God in our physical bodies. It does not mean that God is an oversized man in appearance. If God looks like *anything,* He must look like *everything,* for He is all. But it does mean that we are like God in our inner natures. We are not merely the physical bodies that we wear. We ourselves are spiritual beings. It is not our bodies but our inner or real selves that are made in the image of God.

God, the All-powerful, must have willed or determined to manifest Himself in His universe before doing so. We, also, have the power to will and to decide. God must know, in order to plan a universe. We, too, have the power to know. God holds His universe together by the attracting and unifying power of His love. We, as well, have the power to love. God must be active in creating and sustaining the life of all that is. We, also, have the power to be active and creative in life.

Some of the religions of the world picture or personify the three basic principles—will, wisdom and activity—as God in Three Persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit represent His three-

fold nature. God the Father originates His universe-family. He, the One Life, wills to become the many lives. God as the Son is twofold. He understands and loves His universe and His creatures. God as the Holy Spirit is continually pouring His life into every particle of matter. Different religions use different words for these three great Aspects or Powers. In the Christian religion they are called the Trinity. But God is all three in one, and our souls or inner natures are made in His threefold image.

The usual idea is that man is a body and has a soul. A little thought shows us that this can not be so. Anyone who has lost an arm or an eye or any other part of the body knows that man is the consciousness that permeates the body. A person suffering some physical loss may be handicapped, but he is the same person still. He has the same power of thought and feeling. He is as much aware of things and people as before. He has the same likes and dislikes. The real truth is that we *are* souls and *have* bodies. The very word "body" is related to our word "abode' and means "dwelling-place." St. Paul speaks of our having a natural body and a spiritual body. Elsewhere he mentions body, soul and spirit.

Why are bodies needed? To act as vehicles or instruments for us in different kinds or grades of matter. There are three grades of physical matter that we all

know: solids, liquids and gases. Our physical bodies are our instruments in this physical matter. Thus we need hands to move objects. We need eyes to see surroundings. We need ears to hear sounds. But we can not think with a hand or feel love with an eye or an ear. There is still finer matter used in thoughts and feelings. In order to contact thoughts and feelings we need bodies of similar grades of matter.

Each of us is really living in and using three bodies. Through the physical body with its senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell, we contact the world of objects. Through the emotional body we have feelings toward the world of people. In the mental body we think, and know the world of thoughts and ideas. All three bodies are present with us at the same time. They interpenetrate one another, just as air and water can penetrate a sponge. Hence our actions and feelings and thoughts can be going on at the same time. It is especially hard to separate our feelings from our thoughts, so closely are they interwoven.

None of these three bodies lives forever. At death the physical body is laid aside. During the after-death period the emotional and mental bodies also fade away. The soul or spiritual self, however, lives on. It is *that* which is made in the image of God and which is immortal or undying. In that, too, is the record of all the experience of the past.

Now everything in the universe has the same source. We *all* share the divine life. Hence we must all be brothers in our origin. We must also be capable of similar growth or development. Not only human beings, however, but also the animals and plants and even the minerals share in the life of God. In minerals the degree of life is less, but the one life permeates all that is. "God sleeps in the mineral, dreams in the vegetable, awakens in the animal, becomes self-conscious (aware) in man, and universally conscious in Christ, the Higher Self."

Brotherhood, however, does not mean equality in development. Some kinds of life are further advanced than others. Some souls are older and thus more experienced than others. Brotherhood means responsibility of the older and wiser souls toward those forms of life—and those souls—that are younger and less evolved. We owe, therefore, to the world such service as we are able to give. We owe this service not only to other people but also to animals, plants, minerals, and all inanimate objects—all of which share with us the one Divine Life.

SUMMARY

In God, the one source of life, "we live and move and have our being." We are made in His image so

far as our souls or inner natures are concerned. We *are* souls and we *have* bodies. These bodies are needed as instruments for our use in different kinds or grades of matter. Our three bodies are not permanent, but our inner selves are immortal or undying. They, our inner selves, have the same three great powers—will, wisdom and activity—that God has. Everything that lives has the same divine origin and the same inner powers in varying degrees of development. Hence we are all brothers, not only with one another but also with everything else that lives. Brotherhood, however, does not mean equality in development. It means, rather, the responsibility of the older and wiser souls for the younger and less advanced.

III THE PLAN AND PURPOSE OF LIFE

God evidently has a plan for His universe. This can be seen in the orderly arrangement of many processes in Nature. Is it not reasonable, therefore, to think that He has a plan for us also? It is not sensible, though, to believe that He newly creates each soul out of nothing or nowhere, at that soul's physical birth. It is not reasonable, either, to think that God gives us only a few days, months or years to prepare for eternity. An abrupt beginning at physical birth suggests an abrupt ending at physical death. We believe, though, that our inner selves or souls do not end at death. There is evidence to show that some persons, at any rate, live on after death of the physical body. Some persons even have definite remembrance of having lived on earth before. If continuing life is true for one, may it not be true for all?

What, then, is God's plan of life for us? His plan seems to be that we shall grow through experience, through what happens to us in life and how we respond to such happenings. We have to make decisions. We make choices that bring us pleasure; we make choices that bring us pain. But we learn from both.

Within a seed there is hidden away the plant or tree that is to unfold. We, also, have within us latent powers of action, feeling and thought. These powers are undeveloped as yet, just as the seed is undeveloped.

They have to be brought out into the open. These powers grow or unfold during our experiences in our lives on earth. Evolution is one name for this development. A more common name for the same idea is progress. For instance: the savage walks and carries a load on his back or drags the load behind him. He swims a stream or floats on a log. Transportation has *evolved* or *progressed* from such simple beginnings. Today man can travel by the modern train, by automobile, by airplane or by ocean liner.

Evolution does not stop with things, or with the mere perfecting of forms. There is evolution of souls as well. Evolution in our soul-life means advancement in our abilities of thought, feeling and action. Our little selves are really always trying to reach something better and higher. The divine spark within each of us is always seeking the great Divine Flame whether we realize it or not.

What end or goal are we trying to reach? The Bible says, "Be ye therefore perfect . . ." Perfection in development of our divine powers—perfection in goodness, wisdom and action—is the goal of human life. But for this no one earth life is enough. The world is our school, and we come back to it many times. This was beautifully expressed some years ago by Berry Benson, in the *Century Magazine*:

A boy went to school. He was very little. All that

he knew he had drawn in with his mother's milk. His teacher (who was God) placed him in the lowest class and gave him these lessons to learn: THOU SHALT NOT KILL. THOU SHALT DO NO HURT TO ANY LIVING THING. THOU SHALT NOT STEAL. So the man did not kill; but he was cruel, and he stole. At the end of the day (when his beard was gray; when the night was come) his teacher (who was God) said: "Thou hast learned not to kill. But the other lessons thou hast not learned. Come back tomorrow."

On the morrow, he came back, a little boy. And his teacher (who was God) put him in a class a little higher and gave him these lessons to learn: THOU SHALT DO NO HURT TO ANY LIVING THING. THOU SHALT NOT STEAL. THOU SHALT NOT CHEAT. So the man did no hurt to any living thing; but he stole, and he cheated. And at the end of the day (when his beard was gray; when the night was come) his teacher (who was God) said: "Thou hast learned to be merciful. But the other lessons thou hast not learned. Come back tomorrow."

Again, on the morrow, he came back, a little boy. And his teacher (who was God) put him in a class yet a little higher and gave him these lessons to learn: THOU SHALT NOT STEAL. THOU SHALT NOT CHEAT. THOU SHALT NOT COVET. So the man did not steal;

but he cheated, and he coveted. And at the end of the day (when his beard was gray; when the night was come) his teacher (who was God) said: "Thou hast learned not to steal. But the other lessons thou hast not learned. Come back, my child, tomorrow."

This is what I have read in the faces of men and women; in the book of the world, and in the scroll of the heavens, which is writ with stars.

We have behind us, each of us, a long line of lives, each life a day in the world school. The lessons we have learned in those past lives show today as conscience. Thus conscience is different in each of us because we have not all learned the same lessons in the same order. We have all been ignorant. We have done both good and evil. So we rejoice and suffer, now, as a result of that good and evil. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." But we have other lives ahead of us in the world school, and our progress can be hastened or retarded, according to our own choice.

On the ladder of evolution we can see below us people who have learned fewer lessons than we have learned. We can see above us those who have learned *more* lessons. Is it not reasonable, therefore, to think that somewhere, sometime, there must be the finished product, the graduate? Someone who has learned all

the lessons of earth life? Someone who has reached the goal of perfection? The Bible says that Christ is such a being—"the first-born of many brethren." He is therefore a great leader and guide. We know Him as the founder and head of Christianity; but He is more than that. "And other sheep I have," He said, "which are not of this fold."

SUMMARY

God's plan for us is the growth or unfolding of our Godlike powers. The goal is perfection. The method is evolution or progress through experience. The world is our school. One life on earth, however, is not long enough for us, if we are to reach perfection. We must return to earth many times, learning one lesson after another. Christ has passed through the world school ahead of us. He has reached the perfection that we seek. He is therefore a fitting leader and guide. Some regard Him as even now the head of all the religions of the world.

IV WHENCE AND WHITHER

We know, of course, that this earth life, for each of us, is limited in time. It begins with the physical body and ends with its death. But what of the soul before birth and after death? Whence does the soul come and whither does it go? Poet and priest say we come from God. The scientist says we result from the union of a father-cell and a mother-cell. Both are right; they are but looking at different sides of the same thing. Religion looks at life from the side of spirit. Material science deals with forms and matter. But our souls, which inhabit bodies, do not begin at physical birth. Our souls are Godlike and undying. They come forth from the Divine Source, which is God, to go through cycles of evolution, or progress. To Divinity, finally, they will return as perfected beings. As Sir Edwin Arnold expressed it:

Never the spirit was born; the spirit shall cease to be never.
Never was time it was not; End and Beginning are dreams!

Where, then, are we before birth into this earth life? We are in a place of waiting. We are in a kind of matter finer than the solids, liquids and gases of the physical world. For a time after death, we are busy assimilating the memories and experiences of the previous life. Later, when that work has been com-

pleted, we come to the point of desiring, and waiting for, an opportunity for rebirth. We know that we grow by earth experience, which is to the soul what food is to the physical body. After we have eaten food, there comes a period of digestion and assimilation. So it is with our souls. After an earth life of experience, we need a quiet time in the after-death life, to think over and assimilate the results. But when that is done, we get hungry again for more experience. That hunger for more earth experience draws us from higher realms. We seek again a father and a mother who can give us the kind of body that we need for our next lessons. The physical body will be new, but the soul itself will not be new. The soul will bring to birth all the experience and ability it has gained in previous lives. It is the urge or will to live in order to get more experience, that brings us back to earth. It is said that no soul returns until it *wants* another earth life.

Before birth we are in a finer, less dense world of matter, getting ready for rebirth. After death the process is reversed. We leave the physical world and withdraw into the finer matter of the higher worlds. Death is not nearly so great a change as people imagine. Death marks the end of existence in a certain physical body, but it is not the end of life. It is only the passing from one stage or kind of life to another.

There is nothing to fear about death. It is no more than moving to a different place. When we move from one place to another here on earth, we usually move into the type of house we have built or provided for ourselves. The same is true when we leave earth conditions and move into the next stage. We find just what we have provided for ourselves.

Death itself is said to be always painless and peaceful for the soul, whatever the body may undergo. It is much like going to sleep after a busy day. In the last moments we have a quick review of the earth life that we are leaving. Usually we are loaded with memories and experiences. We are glad to leave the tired physical body; we welcome rest. And rest for a while is usually our lot. After death the soul is withdrawing into itself. The first step of casting off the physical body has taken place. The soul now lives in the emotional body—sometimes called the "astral" body because it is more luminous or "star-like" than is the physical body. During earth life most persons find action most important. After death, when there is no longer a physical body, we find that feelings and thoughts affect us most. But first of all, as we leave the physical body, we fall for a time into a dreamy, half-conscious state.

At length we awaken into a world of finer matter. This world is similar in appearance to the physical

world just left. It is not far away. It is right around us, interpenetrating the physical world. It is different, though, in its conditions. We no longer have physical eyes or ears or other sense organs. Yet as we awake, we perceive in a new way, through feelings and thoughts, whatever is around us. We also feel much more alive than before death, for there is no heavy physical body to weigh us down. Of course we can communicate with others in like circumstances. We have no speech organs, though, with which to speak, as in the physical world. Hence we can not usually communicate with friends in earth life during their waking hours. But when these friends are asleep, they slip out of their physical bodies temporarily. During sleep, they, too, live in their thoughts and feelings. Then there can be free communication between the living and the so-called dead. In fact, the living usually miss the dead more than the dead miss the living; for the living, when they awaken, ordinarily forget these contacts experienced during sleep.

Now we are the same persons after death as we were before death, just as we are the same persons during sleep as we are during waking hours. There is nothing in the passage through death that makes us all-good or all-wise. It is like going from one country to another. All that is gained is the little extra experience of the journey along the way. A traveler

remains the same person. He has the same habits. He thinks and feels the same way as before. He continues to like the same things and the same people. So it is with the traveler through the gateway of death. He remains the same person, and he finds the same conditions, with one exception. After death he has no physical body. If he craves food or drink, he now has no way of eating or drinking, except in desire or thought. If he craves other pleasures of the physical body, he can not satisfy his longings. Hence he may suffer because he can not get what he wants. If he is accustomed to coarse, vulgar thinking and feeling, he will find himself surrounded by such until he is tired of it and longs for something better. He has to be purged or cleansed of all selfish and coarse desires; but the only hell he will find after death is that which he has built for himself by his feelings and thoughts during earth life. For most people of average good life, the after-death life is pleasant, once they have become accustomed to the changed conditions. They find companions of their own type. They can follow whatever line of interest they choose, provided that no physical body is needed for it. They have opportunity for unlimited travel. And they can occupy themselves in study and service according to their capacity.

Yet good or evil as the earth life may have been, developed or undeveloped as the soul may be, a time

comes in the after-death life when the emotional body is cast off. Then we enter as much of the heaven life as we have earned and can enjoy. If we have loved family and friends, we find these loved ones there. If we have loved music, we can be surrounded by beautiful music. If we have given unselfish service, we find yet greater joy of service. Suppose, though, that we have little capacity for any kind of enjoyment beyond the physical pleasures of a selfish life. Then we shall find but little joy or interest in the heaven life. Our stay there will be short. Yet every one of us will have his share, according to what he has earned.

The heaven life may be long or short; but however wonderful it may prove, it, also, comes to an end. The mental body wears out and drops away. The soul or ego then stands as its own true self for a flash of time. It has drawn in the experience of the past life—actions, feelings and thoughts. It has assimilated them into capacities for the future. Then comes the hunger for more earth experience. The soul gathers around itself the matter for new mental and emotional bodies, and then seeks rebirth by way of a physical body once more.

SUMMARY

This earth life for each of us begins with the physical body and ends with its death. The physical body is not permanent, but our souls are immortal or undying.

They live before birth and after death. Before each new birth into a physical body, the soul is in finer matter, first resting between earth lives and then later waiting for rebirth. After a lifetime of earth experience, followed by the death of the physical body, the soul again withdraws into its bodies of feeling and thought. The kind of life we have after death depends on the kind of life we had before death. The life after death may be long or short, pleasant or unpleasant, according to the forces and habits we have cultivated. Each of us, therefore, may be said to make his own heaven or his own hell. Yet each of us has at least a brief period of bliss before starting again on a new round of experience.

V THE LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

One of the most important natural laws is the law of cause and effect. This law has several names. Emerson called it the law of compensation. It is also called the law of justice or the law of balance. A shorter name for it is *karma.* Karma means action and also its result or reaction. A ball thrown against a wall bounds back. Here is an example of action and reaction. The throwing of the ball is the action or cause; the bounding back is the reaction or effect.

Like other natural laws, this law of cause and effect is unchangeable and unending. Natural laws can never be broken or set aside. This law of action and reaction knows no favorites. Its results can not be avoided or escaped. Ignorance of the law does not prevent its operation. Effect always follows cause, no matter who or what is concerned. The same cause, unless modified by added causes, invariably produces the same effect. A second cause may enter, though, and change or modify the anticipated result. When a ball is thrown against a wall, the first cause is the force used in throwing. The result of this first cause, alone, would be a return of the ball in a straight line. But a second cause, the law of gravitation, also enters. The force of gravitation pulls the ball downward. The result is therefore the effect from both causes—a com-

bination of the two. Hence the ball returns in a downward curve.

This law works just as exactly, just as invariably, in the realms of thought and feeling. Every thought, every desire or feeling, every action has an effect. Sometimes the effect comes immediately. Sometimes it is delayed or comes in installments. But sometime, somewhere, each force must work itself out. In the Bible this idea is expressed in various ways in both the Old and New Testaments:

Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. (Galatians 6:7).

Give, and it shall be given unto you . . . For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again. (Luke 6:38).

If we want wheat, we must sow wheat. We can not get wheat by planting roses. The law is the same in the worlds of thought and feeling. We can not sow ignorance and hope to reap knowledge. We can not sow hate and selfishness and then expect to reap love. Nor can we shift our responsibility to another. Wrongdoing by one can never be set right by the sacrifice of someone else.

The working out of this law of karma is often a complex matter. We are living in our actions, in our

feelings and in our thoughts—all at the same time. We are creating results, therefore, in each of these at the same time. Action, feeling, thought—each produces an effect of its own kind, at its own level. Our physical actions bring results in our surroundings or circumstances. If we act in such a manner as to bring happiness to others, we shall sooner or later find ourselves in fortunate circumstances, with greater opportunities for spreading happiness and goodwill. If we cause pain to others by our neglect or misdeeds, we shall find ourselves finally in unhappy surroundings. Thus, in the long run, we learn to act in a "good" manner that will bring us pleasant results.

Feelings or emotions are usually combined with desires. Our desire-emotions tend to draw to us the objects desired. They also determine our family and social relationships. If our desires are unwise ones, sooner or later they bring us unpleasant results or even great suffering. Through wise desires we gain pleasure and happiness. Thus through experience we learn to control our desire-feelings and to choose wisely. Desires also make opportunities. By desiring opportunities along a particular line, we attract to ourselves the surroundings that will provide those opportunities.

Most important are our thoughts, for thought is the creative force of the universe. If our thoughts are

what they should be, there will be little trouble with our desires and our actions. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Thought reflects itself in mental power and in character. Any exercise of thought, whether good or bad, constructive or destructive, brings greater power of thought—just as exercise of a muscle strengthens that muscle. Selfish and hateful thoughts, of course, do not help us to build desirable habits and qualities of character. Such thoughts produce undesirable traits that finally bring sorrow to ourselves as well as to others. Knowing that we become what we think, we can set ourselves to think of such qualities as we should like to have. Bit by bit the moulding power of thought will build them into our characters.

Through this law of action and reaction we get back from the world, sooner or later, exactly what we put into it. It is true, of course, that the balance of justice is not always struck within this one lifetime. Then, too, motive or purpose must be considered, apart from the action. Motive builds character. A good motive, even though the deed be foolish or ill-advised, contributes to character building, in spite of the unhappy effect of the unwise deed. We may sometimes wonder, for instance, why a good man fails in business while a bad man succeeds. But there is no cause-and-effect relation between goodness and money-getting. The effect lies always within the cause.

Whatever our present circumstances and characters may be, we have the power to improve them. This law of cause and effect is just and can not be escaped. If our circumstances are unhappy, because of our own wrong action in the past, we can not fall back on anyone else and expect him to pay for the wrong we have done. But the very fact that the law is just is our safeguard and our hope. Our surroundings and our characters are the results of causes we ourselves have set in motion. As we have produced these conditions, so can we change them. We can set in motion new causes that will bring what we want, either to have or to be. Furthermore, it is not what happens to us from the outside that matters. That happening is the result of the past. What does matter is the way in which we meet the present, for that will determine the future. We can try to meet misfortune with courage and calmness. We can endeavor to make the best of whatever comes. We can determine to make the utmost of every opportunity. Most important of all, we can shape our thoughts and feelings in the right way. We can endeavor to feel goodwill even toward those who seem responsible for our troubles. The best shield in all the world is an atmosphere of kindly, loving thought and feeling. No real harm can reach us through that armor.

Moreover, any set of circumstances lasts only so long as the soul needs it for growth. When we have fully learned the lesson intended, circumstances change, for they have served their purpose. Indeed, everything that happens to us can be considered in one or more ways: (1) as a lesson to be learned, (2) as a debt to be paid, (3) as an opportunity to give help. In any case we can rest assured that whatever we experience is the working out of the Good Law.

It is important, however, that we begin *now* to work in harmony with this law of cause and effect. Every day we are setting new causes going. Every day we are forming new relationships. We have it in our power to make ourselves and our future what we will.

SUMMARY

One of the most important natural laws is the law of cause and effect. This is also called the law of karma or action and reaction. Like other natural laws, this one can not be side-stepped or escaped, either in the physical world or in the realms of thought and feeling. We reap eventually just what we sow. We are living in our actions, feelings and thoughts, all at the same time. Thus we are creating results in each of these at the same time. Each produces results of its own kind and at its own level. Most important are

our thoughts, for we become what we think. It is also important that we begin *now* to cooperate with this law of karma. Causes set going now will determine our future. By understanding this law and working in harmony with it, we can make ourselves and our future what we will.

VI THE LAW OF REBIRTH

We have seen that life is not a mere matter of chance. Neither is it reasonable to consider it as partly chance and partly law. Life is a matter of natural law and order. The goal is perfection in goodness, wisdom and action. To reach this goal we must develop or evolve through experience. One earth life is not long enough to allow any one of us to reach the goal. How or where, then, shall we reach perfection?

Perfection can not be attained simply by passing through the change called death. Evidence shows that individuals who have passed through death are the same persons still. They have merely lost the physical body. They are no better, no wiser, and no more capable than before. Neither can we expect the after-death life to afford suitable conditions for completing our experience. Our knowledge of human life could never be completed there, without physical bodies and surroundings. Only additional earth life can supply the conditions needed for our development to perfection.

Furthermore, the love of justice is born in each of us. We learn that we reap what we sow and that this is a wise law. Yet we can see that the balance is not always set right within this one earth life; nor can death alone balance the scales of justice. After-death life is too different from earth life to offer oppor-

tunity for the full working out of the law of action and reaction. For example, great physical pain or injury inflicted needlessly on one person by another would normally be balanced by physical pain or injury returned to the doer of the action. But such return can not be made in the after-death life, since the offender has no physical body. Or suppose that one man has deliberately ruined another financially. How can the balance be adjusted after death, when money has no longer any purpose or value? Wrongs committed in earth life can be righted only in earth life.

Returning again and again to earth life is the only way we can have time and opportunity to grow to perfection. It is the only way that opportunity can be given for righting the wrongs that we have done and those that have been done to us. It is the only means by which we can learn to cooperate fully with the divine plan of evolution, or development, for us. When we have learned by experience to work with the great laws of life and not against them, and when we have reached the goal of perfection, we shall no longer need to return. The process of *reincarnation* (*re*-again; *in*—into; *carn*—flesh) is only a means to perfection and to the carrying out of justice, not an end in itself.

As soon as we realize that this earth life is not the only one, we begin to understand many puzzling things.

We understand, for instance, why some of us have at birth greater capability than others. We see why some of us are born into easy circumstances and others into poverty. We know why some people seem more lovable than others. These differences are not the results of the whims of some unjust Creator. Those of us who have pleasant surroundings from the moment of physical birth have earned them heretofore in other lives, not by taking but by giving. Or such surroundings are granted us in order that we may learn some needed lesson or pay some established debt. Those who have fine characters have already learned many lessons of life. Less evolved souls are simply children in a lower class in the world school. No one is hopelessly wicked. None will ever be condemned to everlasting punishment. But all must learn.

We begin to understand why, at first sight and without apparent reason, we like some people and dislike others. We are born here among old friends and old enemies in order that old debts of love and hate can be adjusted. Usually members of the same family are individuals who have built up, in the past, close ties of love. But sometimes old enemies are brought into the same family. Then family ties may help to soften the old dislike.

Each of us, in the past, has worn both masculine and feminine bodies. In male bodies, we learn mainly les-

sons of the head—lessons of mind and strength. In female bodies, we learn mainly lessons of the heart—lessons of love and sacrifice. The soul itself has no sex, but needs both types of lessons in order that it may attain to perfection. For the same reason we have been born into various nations or races and at different periods of history. In this way we have gained a store of varied experience, in many lands and among many peoples.

Reincarnation is not a new teaching. It was known among the ancients. It was also current in early Christianity. Although Christianity now, for the most part, rejects it, there are references to it in the Bible and in early Christian writings up to 553 A. D. (See Malachi 4:5 and Matthew 17: 10-13). The doctrine was dropped from later Christian teachings because of misunderstanding. Reincarnation was confused with transmigration, which means the return of a human soul in an animal body, and any such return would be a step backward. As evolution or progress is the law of life, transmigration does not normally take place.

The knowledge of reincarnation, however, has been kept alive through the centuries. Both saints and scholars have taught it. Among prominent people who have believed in it may be mentioned Emerson, Whitman, Huxley, Edison and Ford. John Masefield expressed it in his well known poem, *"My Creed."*

Other writers and thinkers have also helped to spread the knowledge.

But why, it may be asked, do we not remember our past lives? In the first place, the human brain does not remember clearly even the events of this immediate earth life. None of us, probably, can recall exact details of what took place ten years ago. The brain is new in each incarnation. How can it be expected to remember what took place in previous lives before it ever existed? It is probably better, too, that at present we can not remember our past lives. Those lives undoubtedly contained sorrowful events that we had rather forget. It is better for us to be able to start each earth life afresh. Yet we do, *indirectly,* remember our past lives. We recall them in our present tastes and abilities and in our ties of love or hate. In the long run, as our souls progress, we shall come to remember more and more. We shall also understand more and more of the use of such pain and such pleasure as we have experienced.

What about the future? Three factors help to determine the next birth. First, the law of evolution tends to push us into circumstances that will develop the qualities we most need. Evolution tends to give us opportunities for learning new lessons. Second, the law of cause and effect limits the choice of circumstances. Our actions in the past may not have

entitled us to the best possible opportunity. Perhaps we deserve only a second-best or even a tenth-rate opportunity. Finally, we must come into birth at such time and place as will allow us to meet individuals whom we have known before. Ties of love and hate, of helpfulness and injury, draw souls together in order that debts may be adjusted.

In any case, divine laws are impartial and therefore kind. They work always for the good of the soul concerned. When we realize this, we can go forward with confidence in the justice of God and in our own power to climb the ladder of lives to the goal of perfection.

SUMMARY

One earth life is not long enough to let any one of us become perfect in goodness, wisdom, and skill in action. Moreover, justice is not fulfilled within the limits of one earth life. Neither can opportunity to attain to perfection, through justice, be provided by after-death life only. Conditions after death are too different from those in earth life. Returning to earth again and again is the only possible way of arriving at perfection. Many puzzling problems become clear to us as soon as we understand this principle of reincarnation. Most of us do not remember clearly any details of our past lives. We do, however, remember

them indirectly in our abilities and in our ties with other people. When we realize that the divine laws work always for the progress of our souls, that realization gives us confidence in the justice of God and in our own power to go forward to perfection.

VII THE WAY OF HAPPINESS

We are all seeking happiness. What brings happiness to one, though, does not necessarily bring happiness to another. To one person, a new automobile may mean great happiness. To another, family and friends bring the utmost satisfaction. To still another, opportunity for study or service may be the greatest joy. As we progress, our ideas of happiness change. But there are certain factors that contribute to the happiness of all of us. The understanding of the meaning of life helps us all, in some degree, in gaining happiness.

Such knowledge helps us by removing the fear of death. It takes away the fear that as souls we come to an end or are doomed to eternal punishment. It shows us that the only thing from which we need to save ourselves is our own ignorance. We learn that progress toward the highest is God's plan for us. From that progress we can not escape. Whatever happens to us is designed to help us along the way, and we ourselves are the only ones who can delay our advance. Hence death is as kind to us as is birth. Death is a gateway to further life.

Understanding these things also helps us to bear with patience any unavoidable sorrow and suffering. All of us have felt at times that our troubles came to us unjustly. But once we truly realize the law of cause and effect, we know that no undeserved suffering can

ever come to us. Whatever trouble we have, we have earned. The debt must be paid; therefore the sooner it is paid, the better. It may be impossible, of course, for us to put aside, entirely, certain suffering—such as the grief caused by the death of a loved one. But there again, our knowledge of after-death conditions is helpful. We feel confident that all is well with the departed one, and that only during waking hours need we be separated from the so-called dead. Our dear ones have not died; only their bodies have died. And we shall meet our loved ones in future earth lives, for no tie of love is ever broken.

A knowledge of these principles of life helps us to create a happier future. It shows us how to bear present difficulties bravely and patiently. By making the best of whatever comes, we build a finer character. That character, in turn, gives us strength and wisdom. It is not enough to have right motives, to will to be good and to do good. It is also necessary to know what *is* good. We learn how trouble may be offset by means of our own good thoughts and feelings and actions. In this way we bring about pleasanter circumstances and better opportunities for ourselves. Thus we open new gateways to happiness.

We have seen that the Divine Wisdom brings us greater peace of mind, by removing fear and easing sorrow. It also shapes our attitude toward life in gen-

eral. We know that we are all children of God, parts of His life, in varying stages of progress. We know that we have no real cause for worry, since the divine laws work always for our benefit. We learn to look for the good in everyone and everything. We find by experience that hatred can never be overcome by hatred but only by love and goodwill. Accordingly, our attitude toward others becomes more tolerant, more kindly and sympathetic. Then we ourselves become more happy, for the law of karma, of action and reaction, never fails.

Eventually the Divine Wisdom turns our thoughts toward a life of helpfulness. We realize that we can not live for ourselves alone. Our thoughts and feelings, as well as our deeds, are realities; as such, they are all the time affecting other people around us. Knowing this, we set ourselves to employ our powers in the direction of good. It is not that we are always thrusting our ideas upon other people or telling them what to do. Rather, we ourselves become on the watch for real opportunities to aid wisely—by thought, word or act—those who need our help. As we progress, we find that we grow by giving as well as by taking. And finally we discover that a life of unselfish service is one of the greatest sources of happiness in all the world.

SUMMARY

We are all seeking happiness, though the objects and methods of our search necessarily differ. An understanding of the meaning of life, however, contributes to the happiness of all. The Divine Wisdom removes any fear of death or of eternal punishment. It helps us to bear sorrow and to avoid many mistakes that would cause future suffering. As a result of our knowledge of the great laws of life, we learn to look for the good in everyone and everything. Our attitude toward others thus becomes more tolerant, more kindly and sympathetic, and we, in turn, become more cheerful and happy. We find that we grow by giving as well as by taking. And finally we discover the greatest happiness of all in a life of unselfish service.

CONCLUSION

Theosophy shows that life has both meaning and purpose. It teaches the oneness of life, hence the brotherhood of all that lives. It teaches that every religion is an expression of the Divine Wisdom. It illuminates the scriptures of religions by unveiling their hidden meanings. Therefore we are not asked to *leave* our chosen religion but to *live* it.

Theosophy offers us an explanation of life—an explanation that is both reasonable and practical. Briefly, it teaches that God is good; that man is immortal; that as we sow, so we must reap. There is a definite plan of life, under intelligent direction and unchangeable laws. We have our place in this plan and are living under these laws. If we understand and cooperate, we shall be happy and shall advance more rapidly. If we do not understand—if knowingly or unknowingly we break these laws—then we shall suffer and shall delay our progress.

But the Divine Wisdom does more than explain these great laws and principles under which we live. It reveals to us our own divine nature. It offers us a way of life—a discovering and unfolding of our inner selves, as a part of God's Plan, which is Evolution.

"The soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor has no

limit." This is the "vision splendid" that awaits us. But this vision will become real to us only as we find the divinity within ourselves and realize our unity with all that lives.